



Narrative Power: Finding Words For Living, Dying, Death, and Bereavement

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Assertions Which Inform This Session

Humans are Story-tellers

You don't have anything if you don't have the stories.

Laguna writer Leslie Silko

Stories and Words are Ambiguous

Someone might read what I wrote and discover something there that I myself did not see but which might just as valid as my original thought.

Henri Nouwen

Stories Evoke Stories

If I tell my story anything like right, the chances are you will recognize in many ways it is also yours

Frederick Buechner

Stories Are Passed On

from *Songs, Blood Deep* by Gwen Westerman

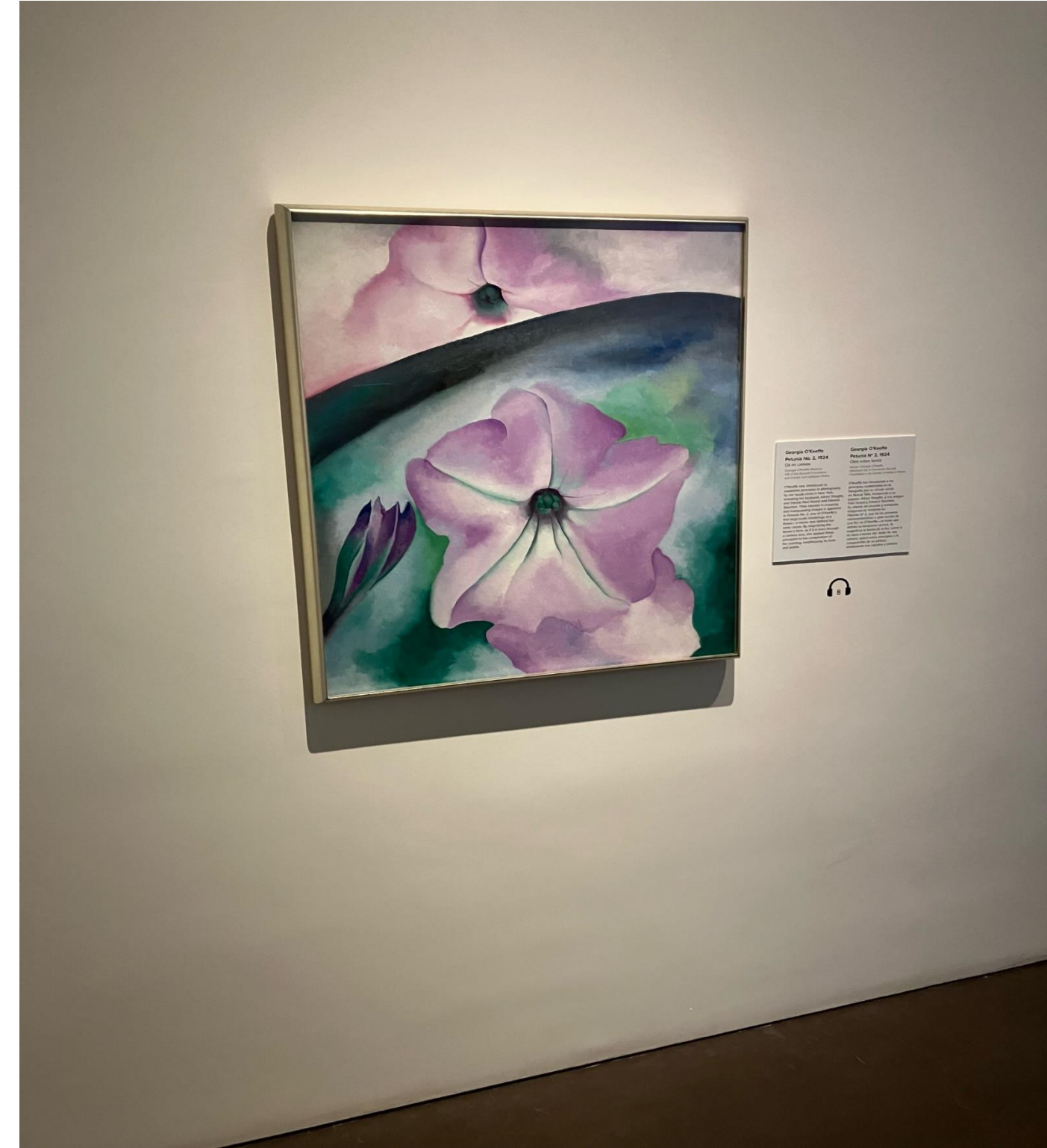
**My grandma told me
that her grandma told her,
that her grandma told her,
“When we came over
the top of the world,
there were already people here.”**

**Beyond seven generations
times seven generations,
we have carried this history
and passed it on the next
generations, in our blood,
and in our songs.**

Georgia O'Keefe

“...you write about my flower as if I think and see what you think and see of the flower...and I don't”

“When you take a flower in your hand and really look at it, it's your world for the moment.”





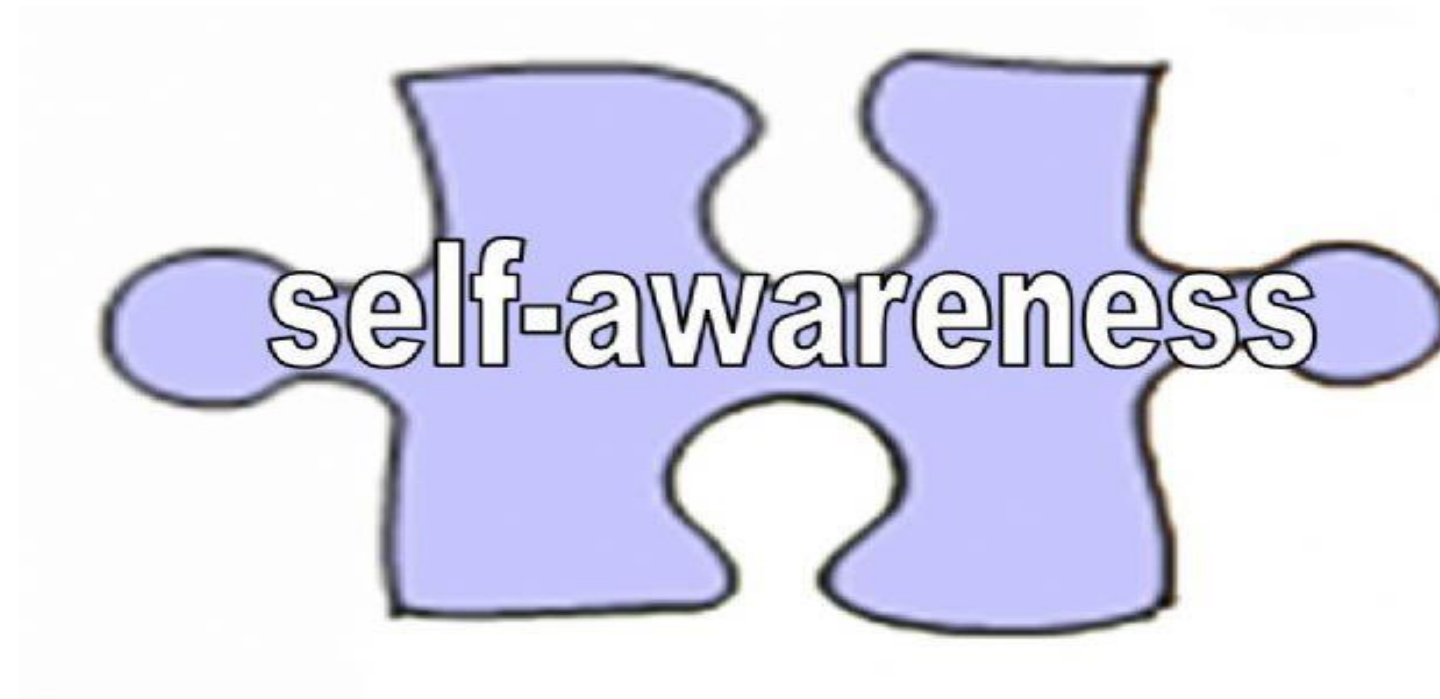
The Guest House

**This being human is a guesthouse.
Every morning a new arrival.**

**A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.**

Welcome and entertain them all!

Beginning lines of a poem by Rumi



Essentially, the only instrument we bring to the helping process is ourselves. Hence, the more self aware we are the more present we can be in the helping exchange.

Paraphrased from comments by Virginia Satir

It's Not Easy Communicating

The Message Sent May Not Be the Message Received



When Working in the Interest of Someone Else's Growth

I See Myself As:

A camera

A detective

A plow horse

A microphone

A ladder

A garbage collector

An explorer

A weathervane

A blanket

compass

A



Based on the work of Virginia Satir

**When Working in the
Interest of Someone Else's Growth – One of our Peers**

Jack of all trades

Container

Customer Service Representative

A walking path

A light bulb

Hamburger Helper

A farmer...cultivating seeds and growth

The medicine of friendship (said about Jerome Groopman)

Six Principles

If Something Is Unmentionable, It Is Also Unmanageable

It's Impossible to NOT Communicate

**Not Everything That Is Faced Can Be Changed,
But Nothing Can Be Changed Until It Is Faced**

Understanding Is More Important Than Agreement

The Direction In Which You Look Will Determine What You See

**How Things Are Handled Is Often
As Or More Important Than What Happens**

Listening Means Listening.

**Many People Do More Preparing
Than They Do Listening**

**Listening, Really Listening,
Requires One To Pay More Attention
To What The Other Person Is Now
Saying Than To One's Response
...or Too Quickly Share Your Story**

Understanding Can Be More Important than Agreement



Losses and the Resulting Grief

**LOSS refers to
being deprived of or ceasing
to have something
that one formerly possessed
or to which one was attached**

**LOSS can and does disrupt
past, present and future stories**

**Grief is a whole body response to losses:
emotional, cognitive, spiritual, and physical**

Life As Teacher

You would think we would be better at this stuff.

If life is the best teacher, you would think we would be better at losses, changes, disruptions. Life starts with the first ending as a child leaves the womb.

John Brantner

Otherwise

I got out of bed on two strong legs

It might have been otherwise.

**I ate cereal, sweet milk, ripe, flawless
peach.**

It might have been otherwise.

I took the dog uphill to the birch wood.

By Jane Kenyon

All morning I did the work I love.

At noon I lay down with my mate.

It might have been otherwise.

**We ate dinner together at a table with
silver candlesticks**

It might have been otherwise.

**I slept in a bed in a room with paintings
on the walls, and planned another day
just like this day.**

**But one day, I know it will be
otherwise.**

**Show Up
And Choose To Be Present**

**Pay Attention
To What Has Heart And Meaning**

**Tell The Truth
Without Blame Or Judgment**

**Be Open To Outcome
Not Attached To Outcome**



Angeles Arrien

Hospitality

What does hospitality as a healing power require? It requires first of all that the host feel at home with loss...and secondly... a free place for the other

**Hospitality embraces two concepts: concentration and community
...*curiosity* (TB addition)**

A helper is not a doctor whose primary task is to take away pain. Rather, deepen the pain to a level where it can be shared.



Milieus of Mattering

A milieu of mattering is a setting/culture/ambience/way of working that affirms that all involved (children, parents, volunteers and staff) will affirm and embrace a milieu of mattering...care matters to all involved.

In England, helper is not commonly heard; however CARER is – family carers, volunteer carers and professional carers.

Consider Storm Home as Guest House Metaphor

Consider adaptations of storm homes as prompts for reauthoring or relearning. What would a storm home, if found or experienced, contain and what would occur there. How do you create or maintain a storm home for your work? Like with an advanced directive, it is preferable to anticipate and choose components of a storm home before tragedy or distress arrives. Be creative.

Turn to a neighbor and name, name only, a storm home component in grief and bereavement care



With

The concept of with has helpful applications when it comes to grieving. Robert Veninga, in his book *How We Survive Our Tragedies*, found that those who do well after adversity credit at least one person who stood with them and gave them hope. Identifying a person who can provide “with” can be crucial. Who are some of your go-to persons to be with when you want to talk, cry, or do something “normal?”

Barriers To “With-ness”

When children are NOT included in loss/grief conversations, their imaginations will often take them to a darker place

When “carers” are distracted, not fully present

When “carers” move to fix, rescue, advise, instead of offering a listening presence

When “carers” do not honor and follow grieving metaphors

When “carers” pay little attention to “tangible” matters thinking it not their job or skill set...when they may be a KEY aspects of loss

Direct and Indirect Methods of Grief/Bereavement Care

Direct methods are those that invite the person to tell or address their own story, using questions, life review, nostalgia, and other methods

Indirect methods include the use of prompts (someone else's words – poetry, memoir, other sources) to elicit reactions, comments, or stories

For this session, both methods will be included; indirect will be emphasized

Finding Words / Found Words / Heard Words

What on earth can he say that make me feel better or keep me alive? Well, there was never anything he could say, that's the funny thing. It was all the stupid, desperately optimistic, condescending things he *didn't* say that kept me alive;

From An unquiet mind: a memoir of moods and madness by Kay Redfield Jamison

A grieving spouse, after her husband's death, wrote: *As far as I can tell there is only one certainty...it is the sure knowledge that I have now learned, am continuing to learn, another language, the language of loss*

(Coughlin, 1993)

...When I finally recovered the will to read (I) searched around me for any book, essay or sentence that might speak directly to the hole I was in...I needed to read some story that paralleled, at whatever distance, my unfolding bafflement -- some honest report from a similar war, with a final list of hard facts learned and offered unvarnished..

from A whole new life: an illness and a healing (1994) by Reynolds Price.

**Storying And Re-storying
After Loss or Disruptive Change
Involves Grieving The Old Story**

**Before Creating The Next
(Not Necessarily New) Story**



**Major Components/Themes/Values
Of The Old Story**

**How Can They Be Reframed In
The Next Story**

Re-Authoring Lives

Grief educator Tom Attig (1996) asserted that after disruptive changes, such as bereavement, many persons describe a process of relearning their world.

Narrative therapist Michael White's (2007) concept of reauthoring stories began as he perceived the parallels between literary stories and those he saw in therapy.

Effective therapy, he asserted, is about engaging people in the reauthoring of the compelling plights of their lives

Eliciting / Inviting Words

Introduce me to your Mom, I didn't know her well.

If your tears could talk, what would they be saying?

How can I be helpful right now?

*Every person grieves in their own way; how have you grieved
other losses?*

*When you knew your partner was so ill, what did you foresee
as time passed?*

When Words Are Not Found Or Offered

There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.

Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Cages Bird Sings*

It's one thing to lose something that was important to you, but it is far worse when no one in your universe recognizes that you lost it. The failure to acknowledge another's loss is to deny that person's humanity.

Kenneth V. Hardy and Tracey A. Laszloffy.

Losing Voice



The language of condolence, no matter how well intended, irritated me. My husband had not gone to a better place as if he were off on a holiday. He had not passed like clouds overhead, nor was he my late husband as if he's missed a train. I had not lost him as if I'd been careless, and for sure, none of it was for the best. He had died.

I knew, of course, euphemism was offered in kindness, and I was grateful for friends for any attempt to comfort me, but what I really wanted was the language of hard truth and reality.

Barbara Abercrombie from *The Language of Loss*

Metaphors for Loss and Grief

**...grief never leaves only changes, it waits outside
doors keep a place at the table**

Susan Williams

One morning, cereal. The next day, cancer.

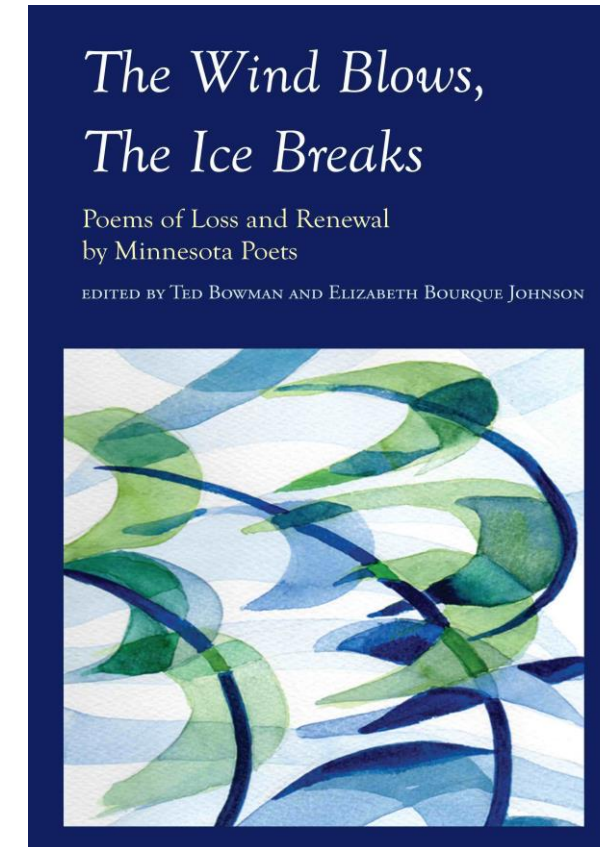
Richard Solly

**...disaster sucks all the air from the room, swings
shut doors in our brains' corridors**

Heid Erdrich

**All I have is a broken voice, a heart immense with
sorrow**

Wang Ping



Metaphors

Bowman perspective –

Metaphors, especially as relates to loss and grief, are ambiguous. When one hears someone use a metaphor for their loss or grief, you **MUST follow their metaphor in order to get closer to potential meanings.**

Metaphor is the most underdeveloped and under-researched part of grief care – Paul Rosenblatt

HANDLE
WITH *Care*



Continual Presence of an Absence

**The World Loves Closure, Loves A Thing That Can,
As They Say, Be Gotten Through
This Is Why It Comes As A Great
Surprise To Find That Loss Is Forever,**

**That Two Decades After The Event
There Are Those Occasions When
Something In You Cries Out At**

The Continual Presence Of An Absence

Curiosity > < Metaphors



- Follow metaphors
- Embrace curiosity – the Columbo method
- Open questions
- Avoid/check assumptions
- Clarify – “let me be sure I understand”
- Manage time – avoid hurrying
- Avoid fixing, rescuing, advising
- Take risks – be curious “help me get a picture of what you are describing”
- Remember metaphors for future use

Metaphors

**I did not know the work of mourning
Is like carrying a bag of cement
Up the mountain at night**

Edward Hirsch

**I have come to realize that my life since Tony's death has been
one endless, exhausting performance. I have cast myself in a
role: *woman being normal*.**

Geraldine Brooks

Clarifying Narrative Therapy

Interest in how our stories are formed and how language shapes our experiences

Narrative is interested in power – who has the power to speak stories into existence and the ways in which we might stand against or join with their stories. Listening and acknowledging one's account is not the same as agreement.

There may be matters deserving further discussion, but listening, acknowledging and exploring perspectives, understandings and values is a positive posture and attitude.

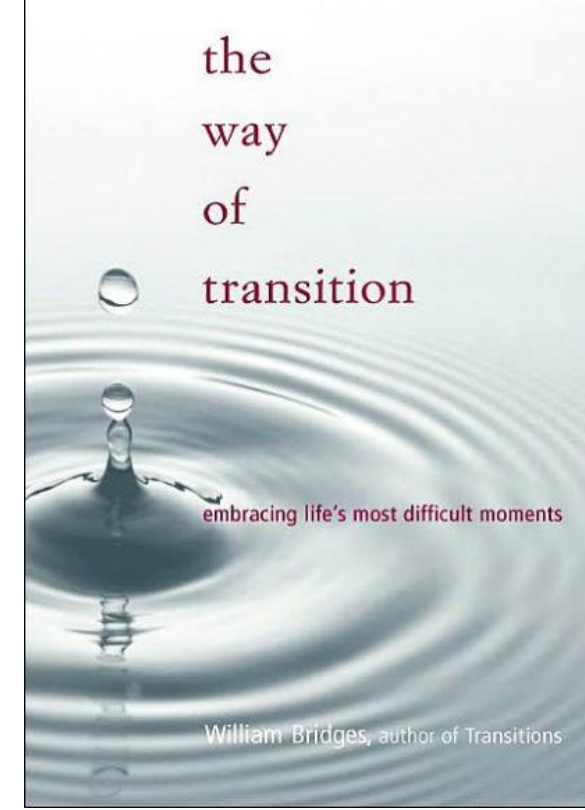
- Michael White, Founder of Narrative Therapy 1948 - 2008 - adapted by Ted Bowman

Change and Transition

It isn't the changes that do you in, it's the transitions. Change is not the same as transition. *Change* is situational: the new site, a diagnosis, death, the new policy. *Transition* is the psychological process people go through to come to terms with the new situation. Change is external, transition is internal.

In other times and places the person in transition left the village and went out into an unfamiliar stretch of forest or desert. There the person would remain for a time, removed from the old connections, bereft of the old identities, and stripped of the old reality. This was a time “between dreams”

William Bridges



Creative Care

Creative care is a reciprocal model. Each of the care partners is imagined to receive benefit; care is an exchange. Creative care is an agreement between people to imagine themselves, each other and their worlds a little differently.

A personal example, a threshold moment, while washing dishes together, her mother asked where a bowl went after drying ... a bowl whose place had been the same for years. Rather than respond with surprise or “don’t you know!”, even a scolding tone,

a new choice can be something like – “oh, let’s look around and find it’s home.” Basting suggests that too many exchanges with persons who live with dementia are factual, right or wrong, exasperation about memory loss, ... not choices using creativity with words and phrases that are respectful for all involved (2020).



Anne Basting in *Creative Care*

What is Bibliotherapy?

- **Bibliotherapy (also referred to as poetry therapy or therapeutic storytelling) is a creative arts therapy modality (see <http://www.nccata.org>) that involves storytelling, the reading of specific texts or writing with the purpose of healing.**
- **Since stories evoke stories, the use of stories in grief work is for the purpose of prompting responses from the grieving person.**

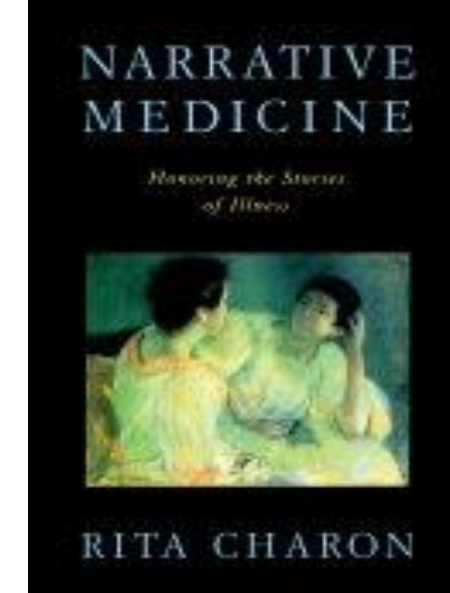


Potential Misuses of Bibliotherapy



- **Use of your own favorite readings instead of listening to the grieving person and making selections accordingly**
- **Use of readings to manipulate a "desired response" instead of prompting the client to create responses with you**
- **Naiveté about culture, language, developmental maturity**
- **To show off**

Narrative Medicine
Whole Person Care
Palliative Care



Each of these foci, in differing ways, emphasize the person, not the condition or diagnosis

Tools include narratives in clinical and medical records

Conversations with clients about aspects “not” directly related to a presenting issues

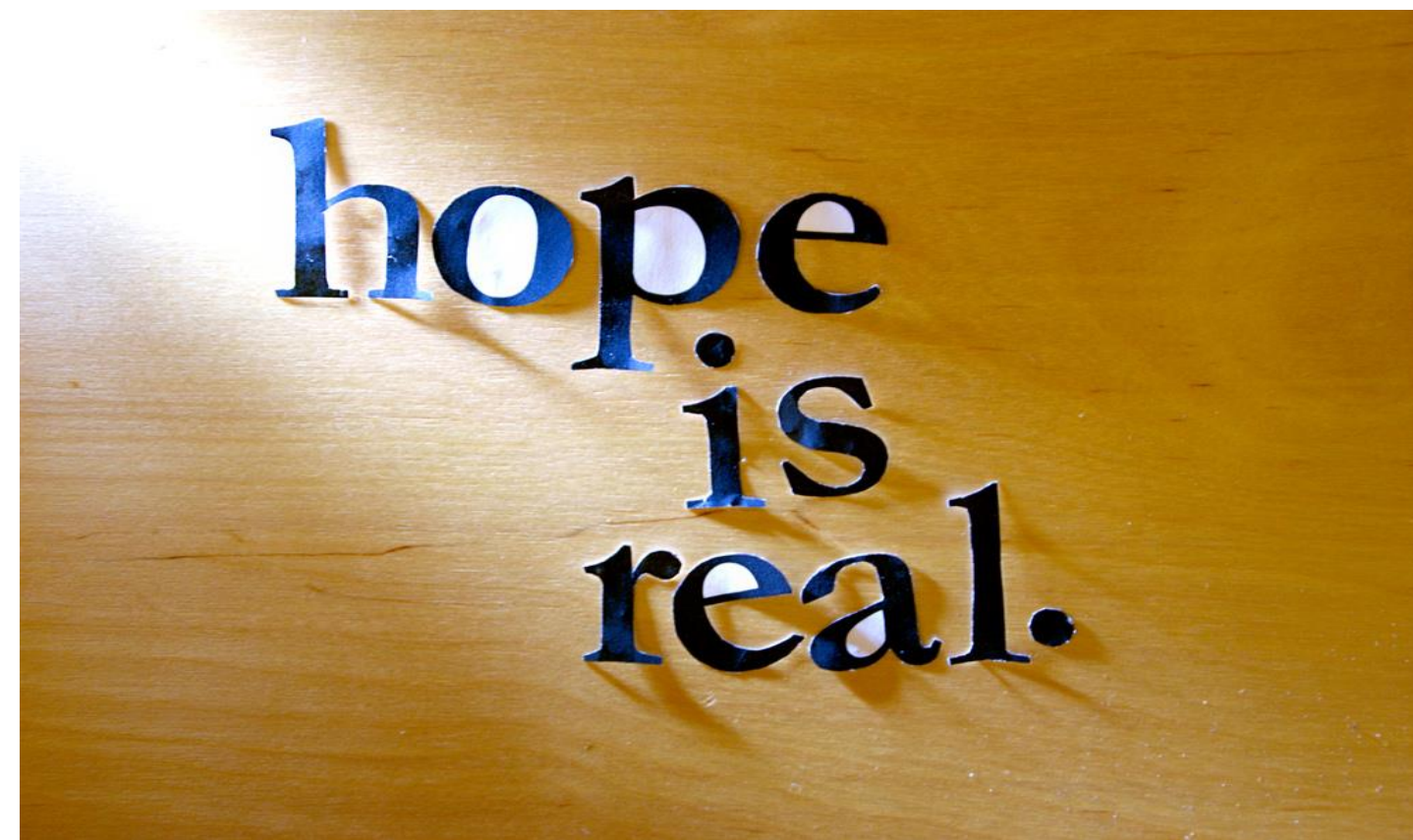
Listening to the person and their stories

- *Narrative Medicine: Honoring the Stories of Illness* (2006) by Rita Charon

Potential Positive Reasons for Self-Disclosure or Use of Stories with Clients or Patients

- **Modeling**
- **Give Permission**
- **Stories invite Stories**
- **Break the Ice**
- **Lower the Barrier between Client and Therapist**
- **Prompts for Therapy**

Always in the interest of growth and healing for the client



Definitions usually include:

EXPECTATION or **DESIRE**

Which can involve **GOALS, ATTRIBUTES, REDEFINITION, MEANING,
PEACE, ENERGY**



**SHRINKING
GRIEF**

**GROWING YOUR
WORLD**



Joy and Grief

both and

It does not seem to be the case that joy and grief can occur simultaneously, but they can occur alternately; that is, the pervasive emotion may be grief, and yet joy can slip in momentarily. So, it may happen that even in the deepest grief, filled with guilt and sorrow and regret and despair, I may still see and feel joy there-in-the-world, trembling at my fingertips. Grief is not thereby lessened; indeed, it often intensified.

Nel Noddings

They Are Just Words

**They are just words
Not hard things, like guns
Not precious, as gold
But ink on paper
Lines, this way and that
Or sounds invisible vapors**

**A right word
A true word
A sharpened word
A clean word
A graceful word**

**Is all we need
To create the world again**

**Words – how many fly, fall, are carelessly flung in a day, a minute
We are as wanton with words as the dandelion with its winged seed
But just words are sometimes
The best we have
Sometimes all we have
And even all we need**

Tony Robinson



Thank you for attending this presentation!

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